

# Fit for a purpose? The Romanian system of VET

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### SUMMARY

**The Romanian system of initial vocational education and training is examined from three different points of view: its relevance to the labour market; its relationship with other parts of the national education system; and its evolution from the past to the future. While there are some major current mismatches between the school system and the labour market, the longer-term perspective seems reasonable as there is a surplus of highly qualified graduates which may prove useful if skill requirements increase. Much has been done recently, with some success, to maintain a progressive vocational route, though the relationship between higher vocational studies inside and outside the university sector is not entirely clear. Romania's IVET system is largely school-based, familiar to some European VET traditions. Romania is participating in EU initiatives, where these can be used to promote modernisation nationally.**

## Introduction

We often hear that vocational education and training (VET) needs to be 'fit for a purpose'. But if this phrase is to have any meaning, we need to specify the purposes for which VET has to 'fit'. There are three different purposes which a VET system needs to support if it is to make a valuable contribution to society. These are:

- the labour market: there are obvious expectations that VET will relate to the world of work - if not, it will not be performing successfully;
- the wider education system: initial VET in particular, is seen by participants as a component of the general education system. It is expected

to 'count' in the educational scheme of things as well as on the labour market;

- the historical position: at any point in time a VET system is on a trajectory of adaptation from what went before towards new social and economic circumstances. Too violent a departure from tradition risks causing mistrust among stakeholders. On the other hand, failure to adapt to the new world will result in disillusionment.

This article looks at the Romanian system of VET from these three perspectives, briefly describing the system first. By this we mean the schooling and qualification structure and the roles of various actors, rather than matters such as the level of resources, numbers and status of teachers, etc.

We also focus largely on the system of initial vocational education (IVET). In common with many other transition economies, Romania has a long tradition of IVET, and of interest is the extent to which this has developed to meet the challenges of a more fluid labour market and of a democratic society in which the aspirations of individuals - as students and as parents - are rising.

Romania's continuing vocational education (CVET) system is far less developed, with limited performance in numbers of individuals and enterprises participating <sup>(1)</sup>, and in the formal structures which govern it. Although we make some references to CVET - particularly in relation to the links between it and IVET - it merits its own evaluation.

## The Romanian system

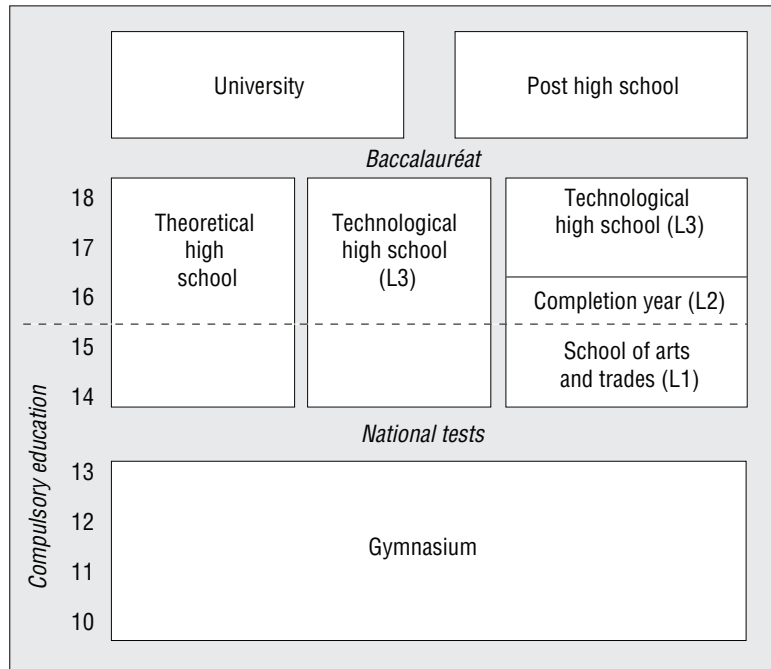
Since the reforms of 2003, the Romanian upper secondary school system consists of four pathways, illustrated in Figure 1:

- a general academic stream at academic high schools (*Licee Teoretice*) leading to a *baccalaureate* (upper secondary leaving diploma), taken after four years' schooling at around the age of 18;
- a technical stream at technological high schools (*Licee Tehnologice*). This also leads to a *baccalaureate*, as well as - and in parallel - to vocational qualifications at Level 3 of the Romanian framework for vocational qualifications (described later). Technological high schools share much common content with academic high schools and are organised into three technical pathways: natural resources, services and technical occupations. Within each pathway several individual vocational qualifications can be acquired. In 2005, 19 vocational qualifications were available from technological high schools. These qualifications are broadly based (such as technician in public administration);

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(<sup>1</sup>) Eurostat's indicator on lifelong learning shows that in 2005 1.6 % of Romanians between the ages of 25 and 64 participated in education or training in the previous four weeks, compared with an EU average of over 10 %.

**Figure 1.** Romanian secondary education system



- a stream leading to artistic, aesthetic or spiritual professions (performing arts, fine arts, architecture and religious orders). This is a small element in the Romanian system;
- a more specifically vocational stream. As will be explained, this 'progressive route' (*ruta progresiva*) was formed from different existing elements. After the recent reforms it consists of a two-year cycle in arts and trades schools (*Școli de arte și meserii*) leading to a Level 1 qualification, followed by a post-compulsory 'completion year', which leads to a Level 2 qualification. These two IVET levels form the standard expected of vocational education, which therefore lasts three years. Students following this route can then have access to a Level 3 qualification by undertaking a two-year high school programme related to their earlier vocational study. Graduation from the upper cycle of high school entitles the graduate to a 'double qualification': a qualification for professional purposes (Level 3) and access to the *baccalaureate*, which counts as an academic qualification. Vocational qualifications available at Level 2 in this system are more specific than those in the main technological high school route consisting of 135 individual qualification trades organised in 16 vocational groups. Fewer trades are available at Levels 1 and 3.

The first decision on which stream a pupil enters is taken at around age 14 after eighth grade (*gymnasium*). Decisions are governed by pupils' performance in national tests taken by all at that stage, by assessments of their performance during lower secondary education and by pupil and parent preferences. Oversubscribed schools and subjects select pupils according to their learning performance. Further decisions are taken by pupils after the first two school years (either school of arts and trades or lower cycle of high school). Those enrolled in the progressive route of qualification have another choice at the end of their 'completion year'.

The *baccalaureate* demands a given combination of subjects, including centralised examinations. For students at technological high schools this combination reflects their vocational specialisation to an extent, but also includes relevant scientific subjects and (for all students) Romanian and a modern foreign language.

Holders of the *baccalaureate* may apply to university. Romania has a sizeable university sector which has grown fast in recent years (over 70 % increase between 1997-98 and 2003-04) and spans polytechnic and academic institutions. Several Romanian universities are private and charge full fees to students.

Outside the university sector, Romania has several post-secondary education institutions: post-high schools and foremen schools (*școli postliceale și școli de măștri*). These are open to students who have attended high school (whether theoretical or technological) and offer a range of qualifications, mostly of two years' duration. They charge fees to students or employers where students are employed.

Romania has developed a national framework for vocational qualifications spanning both initial (IVET) and continuing training (CVET). Notionally there are five levels, with Level 1 being the lowest; these are set out in Figure 2. However, for reasons we will explore later, no qualifications are currently allocated to Levels 4 and 5 (higher technical, managerial and senior professional roles). Vocational qualifications, whether provided in IVET or CVET, are formally approved by the National Adult Training Board (*Consiliul Național de Formare Profesională a Adulților* - CNFPA), which is also the National Authority for Qualifications. The process of validating vocational qualifications is becoming more formalised in sector committees, consisting of relevant social partners established by the CNFPA. Some 23 are envisaged, of which 22 are functioning. The curricula, as opposed to training standards, of IVET qualifications are approved by the Ministry of Education; the ministry does not have a role with CVET qualifications, though schools can participate as providers of adult training and are encouraged to do so.

Vocational programmes are presented in units. In the secondary school system there is a standard credit rating applied to each unit representing its weight, with a set number of credits for each level of vocational qualification, corresponding to the years of schooling necessary for each level (for example, credits appropriate to two years full-time study for Level 1 qualifications in the arts and trades schools). The number of credits is

**Figure 2.** Levels of Romanian vocational qualifications

- Level one:** worker – associated with vocational competences, applying knowledge in a professional activity from diverse vocational groups characterised by routine and predictable tasks.
- Level two:** qualified worker – associated with vocational competences, applying knowledge in a certain activity, with non-routine tasks, responsibility and teamwork.
- Level three:** technician/foreman – associated with vocational competences, applying knowledge in an extended area of professional activity, with diverse and complex tasks, excluding routine. The tasks involve decision-taking, responsibility and, sometimes, teamwork with coordination responsibilities.
- Level four:** associated with vocational competences, applying knowledge in an extended area of professional activity, with diverse and complex tasks, characterised by a significant level of personal responsibilities, coordinating activities and allocating resources and performance.
- Level five:** associated with vocational competences, applying knowledge in especially diverse, complex and unpredictable contexts. Independent decisions and high level of responsibility, including managing staff, allocating resources, analysis, diagnosis, design, planning, execution and control.

the same for any qualification at a given level. In the school system, key skills are part of every qualification - including a foreign language, problem solving, quality assurance, health and safety. The balance between them varies to some extent between programmes; however all must be included.

Qualification design in the secondary school system is undertaken by teams centrally coordinated by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development (NCTVETD). Units of training standards are developed and translated into teaching curricula. These are also modular; key skills are either presented as independent subjects (for example, modern languages or information technology) or integrated into other subjects for the purposes of teaching. Schools are required to follow training standards and teaching curricula, though there is scope for locally developed curricula. Providers of adult training, IVET schools and their partner enterprises or local committees for social partnership in IVET may propose their own training standards for validation to the sectoral committees. Adult training providers have considerable discretion over the teaching curricula leading to these standards. In several cases work has been done to develop occupational standards, though some of this is a little dated. There is no practice yet of regularly analysing occupational standards before presenting a qualification. Where these standards exist, based on the methodology, they are expected to influence the training standards and qualification.

Assessment in the school system is carried out by teachers for each unit, supplemented by a final examination for the award of the qualification. For

qualifications at Level 1, the final examination comprises a series of practical tasks, pre-set and made public by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, which are assigned to students randomly. The results are judged by a panel which includes members from outside the school - they may be trade unionists, employers or professional staff from another school. For Level 2 qualifications, the final certification test includes an oral presentation of a project followed by a practical demonstration. The project must be developed by the student during the year's programme and teachers monitor and tutor the process. For qualifications at Level 3, assessment and final certification are similar to Level 2 qualifications, the only difference being the project's complexity. In addition to the Level 3 test, graduates of upper secondary education are entitled to enter the *baccalaureate* examination, which has academic purposes. Candidates who pass the *baccalaureate*, regardless of whether or not they have a vocational qualification, can go on to university.

Planning IVET provision is essentially a 'bottom-up' process. Schools propose the number of entrants for each year in the various vocational groups they offer. These are considered and approved by school inspectors within each county school inspectorate based on the total amount of centrally approved funding. In recent years initiatives have been taken through regional and local (county-level) education action plans, to link better the provision of IVET programmes to trends in economic development. These are intended to influence school plans, rather than dictate provision. Post-secondary institutions have considerable freedom to adjust their intakes as they see fit (and according to student demand). Most formal adult training for job-seekers and unemployed people is commissioned from training providers by the National Agency for Employment according to the occupations required by employers.

Having outlined the system we now examine its three strands - the labour market, the wider educational system and its evolution from the past to the future.

## Fit with the labour market

There is considerable dissatisfaction within Romania about the appropriateness of the fit between IVET and the labour market. Employers complain that students are not well prepared for the realities of working life and that the standards to which schools train do not reflect the demands of the workplace. However it would be hard to find a country - particularly with a school-based system such as Romania's - where such complaints were not made. More transparent training standards and validation by sector committees aim to improve the relevance of qualifications. Several new sector committees have become enthusiastically engaged in reviewing standards, which can lead to contention on the balance between educational and longer-term career aims for individuals, on the one hand, against immediate labour

market needs on the other. Such debates are not always easy, but they need to take place.

Youth unemployment in Romania is high; in 2005 under 25s were three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, compared to an EU average of 2:1 (Eurostat). This is a long-standing feature and may reflect the fundamental problem of aligning IVET to the labour market. However, there are some peculiarities to the Romanian economic situation which could lead to such a situation regardless of the quality of IVET. Following the dramatic decline of large manufacturing enterprises, considerable numbers of older skilled workers in Romania either reverted to family agricultural work or moved abroad. This stock of 'hidden' unemployment both serves to depress official unemployment rates among adults (Ciobanu and Paciog, 1999) and provides stiff competition for young graduates of the IVET system, who tend to come at the end of the line for available jobs.

Nevertheless, the school system could do more to expose young people to real, or realistic, working situations. This arose naturally when, in communist times, many vocational schools were effectively attached to a single local enterprise. It was clear where students were going to work and arrangements were made for visits and practice, in line with the recruitment plans of the enterprise. Such links have mostly vanished, so the difficult process of establishing links with new, small firms is being undertaken and is an important focus of development at local level.

New curricula include mandatory work experience, and re-equipping schools clearly helps to add realism. At the same time, employers need to appreciate it is unrealistic to expect students to arrive absolutely ready for work as they might have done in the past, and that they need to offer in-company training for new entrants.

The match between school-based vocational curricula and the qualitative demands of employers for the occupations concerned is being addressed in four complementary ways, using experience from other EU countries.

First, by using information from the world of employment to help establish the right training standards - sometimes through 'scientific' analysis of occupations by defining occupational standards, sometimes with direct involvement of employers in designing programmes, and sometimes by examining training standards in other countries.

Second, to assign responsibility for the formal validation of training standards to the authoritative representatives of industry, namely the sector committees we described earlier.

Third, to increase the exposure of school-based students to practical work in realistic conditions, through work experience and links with employers.

Fourth, to encourage a degree of 'adaptation' of national standards and curricula to local conditions through the modular structure of qualifications.

The Romanian view is that none of these mechanisms by itself will guarantee a match between IVET training and labour market needs, but that

together they might. These mechanisms are not yet comprehensively implemented, but the direction is clear, and future IVET development initiatives are focused on these areas.

An apprenticeship system could smooth the transition from school to work (OECD, 2000). However, Romania has no recent tradition of apprenticeship <sup>(2)</sup>, though legislation has recently been introduced to provide a framework for apprenticeship contracts. It remains to be seen whether this will be widely taken up.

One can also consider whether there is a match between the levels and occupations studied by VET students and the demands of the labour market. In terms of levels of education, the 2004 labour force survey (Amigo, third quarter) showed that around half of Romanians aged 25 to 34 had a qualification at the current Level 3 (high school) or above, whereas occupations demanding this level of attainment (professional, managerial, technician or administrative staff) accounted for only around half the employees. Conversely, those with a level of qualification corresponding to Romanian Level 2 accounted for about a quarter of 25 to 34 year olds, whereas the proportion of employees in the relevant skilled occupations was over a third. It appears Romania is producing overqualified young people for the jobs currently available. This, however, may be a sensible position to adopt if, as is hoped, demand for higher skill levels increases in an expanding economy. The proportion of younger people with qualifications at Level 1 or below - at around a quarter - currently roughly matches the proportion of employees with low levels of qualification, though this must be a worry for the future given the likely reduction in low-skilled occupations. Introducing the 'completion year', aimed at encouraging Level 1 students to go on to Level 2 qualifications, is an attempt to reduce the number of young people qualifying at the most basic level.

There is undoubtedly a significant mismatch between the types of occupation for which training is available and the demands of the labour market. Over 70 % of entrants to the arts and trades schools in 2004 were in mechanical, processing or production occupations, with less than 15 % in services. Perhaps understandably, there is no attempt to replicate in schools the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture (36 %) since this is expected to decrease, but it is not clear whether the emphasis on manufacturing occupations results from the past rather than from estimating future demand. Some believed accession to the EU would rejuvenate Romanian manufacturing industry, but employment has declined by more than 50 % since 1990 and now accounts for only one in three employees. Romania is attracting inward investment, but it seems unlikely to be in the labour-intensive processes of the past, and competition from the Far East in mar-

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<sup>(2)</sup> This should not be confused with recently restructured 'apprenticeship schools' (*Școli de Ucenici*) which, despite their title, did not operate apprenticeship arrangements with employers. Before Communist times an apprenticeship tradition did operate in parts of Romania, and historical evidence of guild systems exists until the end of the 19th century.



kets for manufactured goods also limits the scope for a large resurgence of manufacturing employment. The national development plan for 2007-13 does not foresee a recovery of manufacturing employment back to the levels needed to justify the current proportion of students taking vocational courses in manufacturing occupations.

It remains to be seen whether the system of regional and local education planning recently introduced will materially influence the occupational distribution of the IVET system. The absence of significant demand for young labour in new occupations currently makes it difficult to persuade schools to go through the painful and expensive business of replacing courses leading to the old occupations. In recent years considerable efforts have been made to modernise training content, broaden qualifications and update equipment and materials, but the sectoral mix of programmes has not changed a great deal.

## Fit with the educational system

We have already noted the significant expansion of Romanian higher education. University education is much prized in the country and is now available to about one third of young people.

In many countries the advent of a mass university system has put pressure on vocational pathways, which need to deliver access to higher education if they are to compete with general education in the eyes of parents and students. In transition economies in particular, rising aspirations of the population and uncertainty about the availability of jobs following vocational education pathways have combined to reduce the attractions of VET (Masson and Fries Guggenheim, 2004).

In Romania this seems not to have happened, or at least not to a large extent. VET pathways in secondary education have roughly maintained their share of young people.

Without doubt, there are many reasons for maintaining IVET pathways in Romania. One was the decision in 1999/2000 to limit access to high schools according to pupils' performance in national tests (Birzea et al., 2000, p. 29), though this seems to have had a greater effect on technological high schools

Graduates	1995/1996	1997/1998	2000/2001	2002/2003
Theoretical high schools	27 %	28 %	34 %	34 %
Technological high schools (*)	38 %	40 %	35 %	34 %
Vocational and apprenticeship schools (*)	27 %	26 %	25 %	27 %

Source: National Institute of Statistics (Romanian statistical yearbook, 2004, Table 15.9).

(\*) Technological high school figures include dedicated vocational high schools. Vocational and apprenticeship schools have now been combined into arts and trades schools.

than on the general stream. Romania has given considerable attention to securing progression routes in its IVET system, including:

- ensuring technological high schools give access to the *baccalaureate* and therefore to university entrance;
- combining formerly distinct polytechnic education with more traditional academic university studies in a unified higher education sector (over half university education is in vocationally-orientated subjects in business or technical studies);
- unifying former apprenticeship and vocational schools (which had different status) into a single arts and trades route, with encouragement for students to undertake at least one further year after compulsory schooling, which means that standard vocational education now lasts for three years;
- offering the possibility of gaining Level 3 qualifications (including the *baccalaureate* and therefore entry to higher education) in the arts and trades route, through a further two-year qualification. In principle, all students entering upper secondary education will have a chance to progress to higher education, a key feature in maintaining vocational routes (OECD, 2000).

Through these measures policy-makers in Romania have attempted to make IVET attractive to students with aspirations. Education in technological high schools is seen as a particular asset by offering a reasonably long-standing tradition of VET leading to higher education. Because successful students pass the *baccalaureate* in addition to their Level 3 vocational qualification they have ready access to higher education, particularly given the vocational nature of much of higher education.

The more recent innovation of a route to Level 3 qualifications via arts and trades schools has yet to prove its worth, but if successful will achieve much the same kinds of objectives as in France by extending the *baccalaureate* to the vocational route, in Sweden through national programmes, and in England by introducing specialised diplomas.

Of course there are problems in seeking to position VET as a progressive educational route. Curricula need to incorporate general as well as vocational content and to be broad. This leads to complaints that studies are not sufficiently specific. And progression demands a carefully formulated balance of studies, which militates against using the modular structure of Romanian IVET as flexibly as it potentially could be.

This deliberate construction of balanced IVET programmes and associated qualifications, which aim both to relate to the labour market and to give access to further educational opportunities as well as act as a foundation for a future career, cannot be expected to suit requirements for adult training, where labour market relevance is the most important aspect and there is less concern about educational aims. It may be that the Romanian system will see adults taking individual units of IVET qualifications, while IVET uses fairly tightly defined combinations of units. The qualification sys-

tem would, in principle, lend itself to such different uses. However very few companies provide or sponsor adult training. Those that do, offer training to comparatively few employees (Behringer et al., 2005). Consequently it is difficult to predict whether the system will be used in this way, or whether adult training (as in several other countries) will lead to different qualifications or remain largely uncertified.

The position of post-high schools in the educational hierarchy is interesting. In the 1990s, they expanded rapidly, peaking at 35 000 graduates in 1999/2000 - around half the output of the university sector at the time. Given that these are largely privately funded, it would seem they fulfil definite demand. Students need to have completed upper secondary education, though not necessarily the *baccalaureate*. Among other functions, post-high schools give opportunities to graduates of academic high schools to gain a vocational qualification. Unlike many other countries, there is little link between post-high school qualifications and universities. Without the *baccalaureate*, post-high school graduates cannot gain entry to university. However, they now seem to be declining in popularity, with fewer than 23 000 graduates in 2002/03. As an alternative to university rather than a route to it, they seem to have suffered from expansion of the university sector. The Romanian authorities are faced with two alternatives - either incorporating post-high schools into a wider higher education sector (with obvious expectations of increased financial support), or positioning them at the 'top' of a strictly vocational ladder. The latter is an unattractive course given the aspirations for higher education on the part of many vocational students. For these reasons there has been reluctance to develop formal vocational qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, as to do so outside the university sector would clearly signal that VET pathways exclude university. But to include university education in the vocational qualifications system would raise awkward questions about central validation and autonomy.

As proposals for a European qualifications framework (EQF) clearly allow for some overlap between post-secondary vocational education and higher education, this may be particularly helpful in Romania; higher education representatives have expressed a good deal of interest in the EQF. More generally, given the high proportion of Romanian university education which is vocational in nature, work is under way to see how it can be linked to the system of industry-validated standards through sector committees. Many of these committees have, from the start, included representatives from relevant university disciplines but the precise relationship between them and higher education in their sphere of interest needs to be worked through and discussed.

## From past to future

Greinert (2004) outlines three broad types of VET system in Europe: a 'market model' under which the system responds to signals from employers and individuals, and operates at some distance from the formal educational system; a 'state-regulated model' under which school-based VET forms an intrinsic part of the educational system which itself dictates destinies on the labour market, and a 'dual-corporatist' model under which the State delegates powers to social partners who agree cooperatively on training arrangements and the entitlements they give on the labour market.

Using Greinert's typology we can easily recognise elements of a school-based model in the Romanian IVET system. Greinert characterises France as the embodiment of the State-regulated model, and indeed there are parallels between the French lycées technologiques, lycées professionnels, all giving access to a *baccalaureate* qualification <sup>(3)</sup>, and their Romanian equivalents. Though it is tempting for those both in and outside Romania to identify the 'bureaucratic State-regulated model' described by Greinert in the communist era, it is clear that the origins of the main pillars of the Romanian system go much further back than that, and may well derive from the State-building initiatives of the late 19th century, when France was a powerful cultural influence.

The characteristics of the school-based model outlined by Greinert (*ibid*, pp. 21-22) seem to hold true for the structures of Romanian IVET as they were prior to recent reforms. The emphasis is on broad curricula with a premium on 'abstraction, verbalisation and theorisation', a distinct hierarchy of schools (high school, vocational school and apprenticeship school), emphasising a distinct qualifications 'ladder', each rung clearly related to different levels of occupation on the labour market.

Greinert's models are clearly 'ideal types'. Most countries incorporate elements from other systems and we can observe such elements in the Romanian context, too. We have already noted efforts to moderate the older, hierarchical system, by combining vocational and apprenticeship schools and by building a progressive pathway towards higher education into this new route. Apprenticeship schemes are also now under development, so Romanian IVET will embrace this additional model. In addition, in recent years preparing to join the European Union provided a strong impetus for reforming the VET system. This stimulus operated at two connected levels. First - in general policy - to align with EU initiatives in VET. Romania has been an enthusiastic participant in developing and testing the common quality assurance framework in VET and has tracked with interest evolution of the EQF. In designing its qualifications framework Romania has deliberately incorporated elements which are common in the EU and which

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<sup>(3)</sup> Unlike in France, there are no formally different versions of the *baccalaureate*; Romania recognises only one, though different combinations of subjects may be taken by students at different types of school.

seem likely to lead to compatibility with the EQF, such as a series of levels with objective descriptors, including key skills and a modular structure which is likely to ease participation in a EU-wide credit transfer and accumulation system (ECVET), should this develop. With many migrant workers, there is understandable attraction to EU initiatives such as Europass.

At the more operational level Romania has been exposed to foreign VET influences through participation in EU and other international development programmes - recent initiatives have been described by Şerban and Ciolan (2005). These programmes, with support from the European Training Foundation to examine practice in other EU countries, have resulted in clear instances of 'policy borrowing' (Finegold, McFarland and Richardson, 1992). Thus authorisation of qualifications has been delegated to sector committees on social partnership lines, and decisions on regional and local education plans also involve social partners, reflecting the influence of northern European systems. However, developing modular curricula and occupational standards would appear to owe more to Anglo-Saxon market-driven approaches.

Such influences are no doubt healthy in giving Romania a rich menu for developing its VET, and there can be little doubt that, as a result, Romania's VET system lies squarely in the European tradition. However their very number and variety poses a difficulty for policy-makers, since there is no guarantee that each policy approach is suitable for Romania, sustainable in the longer term or - for that matter - compatible with others. Thus, there are signs that the modular system does not operate as flexibly as it does in market-driven systems for which it was originally designed. There are doubts whether a full suite of regularly updated occupational standards is either affordable or necessary in Romania. Romanian policy-makers have therefore become more selective and questioning in adopting recipes from abroad, and doubtless this process will be reinforced when Romania assumes more control over specifications for development projects, as it gains access to EU structural funds instead of accessing externally controlled aid programmes.

## Conclusion

In contrast to a CVET system which is still forming, Romania's IVET system appears well established and understood. As to its fitness for purpose, it seems comparatively well placed to secure the educational progression important in sustaining VET in an increasingly aspirational society. No doubt more can be done both to secure progression in the arts and trades route (where it remains to be seen whether considerable numbers of students will actually avail themselves of the new opportunities at Level 3), and to resolve constructively the slightly anomalous position of post-high schools. As noted, the Romanian system seems well aligned in the family of European VET systems - and in some areas, such as ECVET and the European quality assurance framework, is playing a prominent role. Alignment with

demands of the labour market is more problematic, partially because there seems not yet to be a clear sectoral trend in demand for labour which would prompt a move from traditional manufacturing trades in schools. The extent to which such alignment is to be achieved, through the new structures of national and local social partnership or through more market-driven mechanisms involving greater student choice with funding and performance measures applied to individual schools and localities, remains to be seen. ■

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